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Establishing successful methods of entrepreneurship education in nurturing new entrepreneurs:

Exploring entrepreneurial practice

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Abstract

Scholars who have studied entrepreneurship education have lent distinct value by demonstrating how it nurtures student entrepreneurial attitudes. Although this has encouraged the development of enterprise through conventional modes of delivery, the issues of method acceptance and staff autonomy in facilitating such teaching approaches still remain understudied. With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to integrate from a practical and theoretical perspective, novel enterprise education practices. Through our findings, we propose a framework where three key learning elements: content, delivery, and support are intertwined and driven by the delivery approach. In this sense, we point that this framework could be adopted by business schools to nurture new entrepreneurs and develop future research.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, learning, knowledge dissemination, entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

To date, the significance of Entrepreneurship Education (EE) has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars (Binks et al., 2006; Gibb et al., 2007; Blenker et al., 2012; OECD, 2012). The present base of literature within this remit have considered nurturing student entrepreneurial attitudes through productive and practical content (Ruskovaara and Pihkala, 2013; Williamson et al., 2013; Kitagawa et al., 2015). These are in order as consistent governmental reporting and university releases, drive the notion that universities must be responsive towards developing enterprising students (Clark, 1998; OECD, 2012; European Commission, 2015). Arguably, contemporary forms of EE encourage entrepreneurial activity by adopting experiential and learning-by-doing modes, however our position in the debate is clear: that effective EE results in increased student enterprise, accelerates the momentum of commercial income from industry and drives collaborative partnership through research and consultancy projects (Beresford and Beresford, 2010; Nelles and Vorley, 2011). An examination of these interactions demonstrates the need for the practicalities of implementation through a constructive alignment of best approaches.

With respect to this, existing EE teaching approaches reveal a dearth of research in areas of content, delivery, and support (Cooper et al., 2004; Béchar & Grégoire, 2005; Smith et al., 2006). At the very least, the expectations of both students and industry should drive universities towards skills-centric and outcomes-based enterprise education. This assumption more suitably reflects the demands and the aims of contemporary EE approaches. Following from this, we are also concerned that a lack of explicit standards across EE approaches may lead to difficulties in achieving the best outcomes. Thus, a unique framework which ensures that content, delivery and support are constructively aligned becomes necessary for driving students to achieve the best EE outcomes.

Given too, the practical benefits of developing and advancing EE education would directly impact on the student participation rates in higher education. The analytical consideration would be to ensure that the thrust of the EE should be committed towards effectiveness, by refining various aspects of entrepreneurial learning. A proper application can include enterprise (*skills-based*), enterprising (*application-based*), entrepreneurship (*new venture-based*) structures to bridge the gap between learning and practicality. Although the interplay of these terms has been known to be interchangeable, however, the increased interest of the EE concept demands an alignment of particular streams of creative and outcomes based educational modules/programmes.

Of course, an effective EE approach should be of a wider societal relevance, establishing links between education, research and lifelong learning. Priorities should be centred on flexible student centric style of delivery with emphasis on quality enhancement. However, recognising the attainment of such initiatives is not solely the responsibility of the tutor, but that of the entire university. The core of our assumption recognises that staff development is crucial to the development of the quality assurance of EE education. Our presented analysis transcends primary methods, to accommodate students from various backgrounds, to include high school and college entrants, continuing university students, mature students, and an evening cohort. In the respective cases, we attempt to highlight how our approach provides meaning to enterprise education. Through this, insights can be drawn as to how an effective EE can thrive within higher education. The analysis of our empirical contribution is focused around one sub-question:

RQ1: How can enterprise education methods nurture new entrepreneurs?

Therefore, the aim of this study is to integrate from a practical and theoretical perspective, a novel enterprise education approach. Our concern is not what the distinct topics should address, but rather the need for a set of criteriology that drives practicality, implementation and evaluation of enterprise education across universities. In an attempt to answer the above sub-question, our contributions presented here are twofold; first, we bring more precision to the direction of an effective enterprise education. In our study, we place the key learning elements of content, delivery and support as particularly very significant, since they sit perfectly within the frame of this research. Secondly, we articulate these observations by introducing a framework for the development of EE, which should be considered importantly. We conclude by presenting solutions to some unanswered questions about EE by demonstrating evidence of the practical significance of our approach in general.

2. Topicality of Enterprise Education

Over the past three decades, the UK has witnessed an increased attention for the inclusion of EE across higher education curriculum (Czuchry *et al.*, 2004; Fayolle *et al.*, 2006; Mason, 2014). The goal has been to address the need for a skilled workforce, by encouraging self-employment and a next generation of entrepreneurs. The value suggests that the expectations of both students and industry should encourage higher education initiative towards skills-centric and flexible modes of education. This more suitably placates a number of social issues evident in our society today. An assessment of the perceived social issues include, the decline of traditional industries, the rise of new work patterns, and most importantly the methods of teaching in universities (Jones and Iredale, 2010). In advancing the benefits of the UK government's initiative to develop EE, a key objective is to ensure that policies provide education with a unique vocational appeal.

This advancement of the EE educator refines the various aspects of entrepreneurial learning towards providing people with the capability to take advantage of emerging opportunities within the labour market. Thus, the expectation is that pedagogies within higher education are designed to give more relevance to life and work so that individuals, particularly students are better placed to develop their skills. It is expected that this provision would create an awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities among students and their tutors alike (Iredale, 1993; 2002).

One serious problem lies in the myriad of entrepreneurial competences demanded across a number of universities. Some of these demands have failed to embrace the need for social, market, emotional, and financial intelligence within their module or foundation programmes. Universities should be equipped to be able introduce their own stipulated, entrepreneurial missions and goals towards building a creative and innovative legacy for their

institutions. The implications of social intelligence within EE, includes the required or heightened awareness of societal conditions and the prevalent issues that affect people, communities, and subsequently industries. Valuing these conditions and issues, in a timely and proactive manner, is a core character trait of entrepreneurs who can productively and commercially benefit from given situations.

Accordingly, market intelligence describes the display of practical analytical skills towards gaining further knowledge about market conditions and competitors. In this sense an appreciation of primary, secondary, and tertiary stakeholders is paramount. The implication of this particular competence is vital in terms of proving entrepreneurial ability, and is core to any form of EE assessment. Thirdly, our analysis of emotional intelligence concerns possessing personal and interpersonal skills such as communication, compassion, and compromise which emboldens positive relationships with others. This fills an important gap as entrepreneurship is ultimately a ‘team sport’, which requires collaboration and respect amongst knowledgeable individuals, groups, and entities.

Advancing isolated empirical studies (Nabi & Holden, 2008; Lourenço *et al.*, 2013) and general reporting (OECD, 2012; European Commission, 2015), demands a consideration of current educational practices that business schools deliver to nurture new entrepreneurs. In this vein, we are concerned with the experiences of educators and students who realise and encourage entrepreneurs from within the UK’s vibrant educational environment. Our synthesis underscores the role and priorities of the institution (Czuchry *et al.*, 2004); the influence of pedagogical practices of academics, and pressures from immediate and national environments as central to the adoption and affirming of effective EE approaches (Fayolle *et al.*, 2006; Mason, 2014). With this in mind, institutions should be keen to maintain admirable student satisfaction rates, supported by industrial connections.

3. Current Methods of Entrepreneurship Education: The way forward

Predictably, EE educators are still at times rigidly coerced into applying traditional methods of education in the absence of knowledge and understanding of teaching entrepreneurship. These pressures can appear from poor adoption of EE from others within the institution, ignorance of EE methods and theory-to-practice publications, a lack of appropriate financial or human resources, or a lack of inspired senior leadership. Applying traditional methods result in variable outcomes when it concerns the many approaches to EE. Therefore, we establish the most effective methods of EE which nurture these nascent entrepreneurs based on two key learning elements; Teaching which includes; content; delivery; and support (digital and non-digital) and Learning Opportunities and Engagement. Specifically, we point to the development of enterprise (skills-based), enterprising (application-based), entrepreneurship (new venture-based) within our approach. For example, the ‘chalk and talk’ debate surrounding EE has previously visited the drawbacks of predominantly theoretical EE towards raising entrepreneurial intentions. In this instance, standard lectures or seminar contact with students have been considered to reduce the opportunities of practicing skill-based activities. Additionally, a lack of sustained finance from institutions will result in poor or non-existent new venture creation programmes.

Extant research lists a plethora of EE methods and techniques which are utilised within business schools globally (Binks *et al.*, 2006; Gibb *et al.*, 2007; Blenker *et al.*, 2012). These encourage teaching, research, and commercial activities that are immediate and primarily beneficial to students. This leads to the adoption of learning modes such as business planning, experiential learning, whilst also acknowledging accepted traits and competences of entrepreneurialism within business schools (Anderson & Jack, 2008; Armbruster, 2008; Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2016). These forms of EE disrupt conventional small business and enterprise teaching, through practical and reflective activities, towards prospective commercialisation from students (Philpott *et al.*, 2011). This transition impacts on the required flexibility of the entrepreneurial educator, the students in receipt of teaching activities, and the endorsement of senior staff, deans, or eco-system enablers in building unique, institutional legacies (Miller *et al.*, 2014; McAdam *et al.*, 2016).

4. Methodology: Importance to Field

Central to EE research is the need to understand the effects on the ‘end user’: students, educators, researchers, businesspeople. These stakeholders influence, inspire, and enrich the improved level of EE content and EE assessment delivered. The increased understanding of the emotions, perspectives, behaviours and longer-standing experiences of these key individuals and groups develops this research towards conceptually framing the beliefs and universally-held truths of EE within educational establishments. Estimates of larger samples of classrooms and cohorts typically require wider-scale quantitative, survey-based forms of data collection. Alternatively, focussed interviews have been widely used in within this remit, to espouse cultural or organisational differences. However, in achieving an appreciation of a well-rounded, contextual assessment of a given programme cohort, a blend or mixture of methods is therefore adopted in this paper. This unique mixed method approach enables data from one method, to be explored or explained by another, resulting in a deeper and richer analytical cycle.

Building on the complementarity of the research sub-question, this paper adopts a pragmatic paradigm of knowledge acquisition, development, and data collection, by adopting an exploratory design of using interview and survey methods. We seek to demonstrate in this research, not only that which can be gained from the empirical studies, but rather what our findings hold for future studies on EE. The basic foundation of knowledge suggests that we identify the best EE approaches needed to nurture entrepreneurs. Given this case, the empirical considerations of our design is sequential by process, such that methods were analysed in isolation before a triangulation with the reviewed literature was achieved.

As this paper aims to assert entrepreneurial practices, it involved a mixed method which underscores the critical issues we aim to address. Our choice of approach is appropriate in order to increase the breadth of participation and depth of relevant knowledge that can be empirically deduced and reviewed. In achieving a maximum variation (Yin, 2009), our respondents included a widely representative choice of participants, transcending both primary methods, spans across many types of students from various backgrounds: high school and college entrants, continuing university students, mature students, and an evening cohort. In addition, our consideration for limiting bias was reduced through the triangulation of methods. The qualitative data was analysed through the use of thematic analysis, in identifying distinct codes and patterns (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). Lastly, the coded process was validated by adopting an inter-rater towards ensuring a concurrence of emerged themes. The finding of our analysis is reported in the next section.

This research firstly investigates the combination of key learning elements to individuate the best educational, entrepreneurial practices that business schools deliver to nurture new student entrepreneurs through three exploratory, semi structured interviews. Nine open questions were constructed based on three teaching elements: content, delivery, and support (digital and non-digital) (Cooper *et al.*, 2004; Bécharde & Grégoire, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2006) and were posed to stimulate interviewers’ opinions and investigate more deeply their perspectives (Creswell *et al.*, 2003). These interviews recount chosen methods, modes of engagement and experiences within business schools. Themes adopted are primarily focussed on method-centric issues impacting on entrepreneurial outcomes, rather than stakeholder-centric topics. The sample comprised of three student entrepreneurs from the age of 29-37 (Table 1). They were enrolled in the Business programme at the University of the West of Scotland (UK), attending the third year module ‘Enterprise Creation’. This module was considered relevant for this study in order to demonstrate the tendency to train students to run a business (as opposite Martinez *et al.*’s (2010) study which shows that some courses do not offer this training). The three students have since started a business, operating in three diverse sectors including beauty, energy, and event.

Table1. Participant Profile

Case No	Gender	Year of birth	Job position	Ethnicity	Main export markets	Age	Educational level	Sector
Case 1	Male	1989	Owner/manager	British	Ghana,Cameroun Bukinafaso	28	Graduate	Events
Case 2	Female	1984	Owner/manager	African	Chad, Niger	35	Graduate	Energy
Case 3	Female	1983	Owner/manager	European	Niger, Ghana	40	Graduate	Beauty services

Source: Authors

5. Findings and Discussion

As emerged, in the era of the digital transformation which is widely affecting not just the way to run a business but also the learning journey within Universities, human skills, ability, and experience still have a determinant role in nurturing future successful student entrepreneurs. Those student entrepreneurs want to be engaged. In fact, one of the respondents declared:

“Yes of course, because you are engaged and would like to know what the tutor is talking about.” The 29 year old male student entrepreneur places a great importance of the lecturer’s style: “I’d never seen this teaching style used in the enterprise classes before. It was very dynamic and engaging and was quite different from what I’d seen in other classes where a lot of the time lecturers just stand and read off slides for an hour” ’ (Case 2).

The engagement induces a knowledge learning process which relies on the content material. As the respondent affirms:

“I learnt several new concepts and some of them I have also applied for my business. For instance, I reviewed my business plan and integrated the financial plan which was provided during the module. I found it very efficient and let me save a lot of money. However, I was inspired to get better in my business by my lecturer” (Case 3).

Delivery and content allowed them to develop critical thinking, applying theories to the real word:

“By looking at case studies or literature during class work or assignment you begin to realise the importance of the concepts and how they play an important role in shaping enterprises. Regarding critical thinking, I must say they play an important role.” (Case 1).

Interestingly, the physical support space is also another relevant determinant because it stimulates creativity and knowledge diversity circulation. According to Turner and Fauconnier (1997) and Del Giudice *et al.* (2014) the process of idea generation comes from the reassortment and transfer of a diverse set of knowledge. In line with this, a student entrepreneur stated:

“I do like workgroups. Personally, I had the opportunity to learn from other people from different countries and mingle different ideas. We integrated a piece of each idea in a unique business idea”. Besides, the digital space is becoming more and more relevant; it made the learning easier and fun to participate” (Case 2).

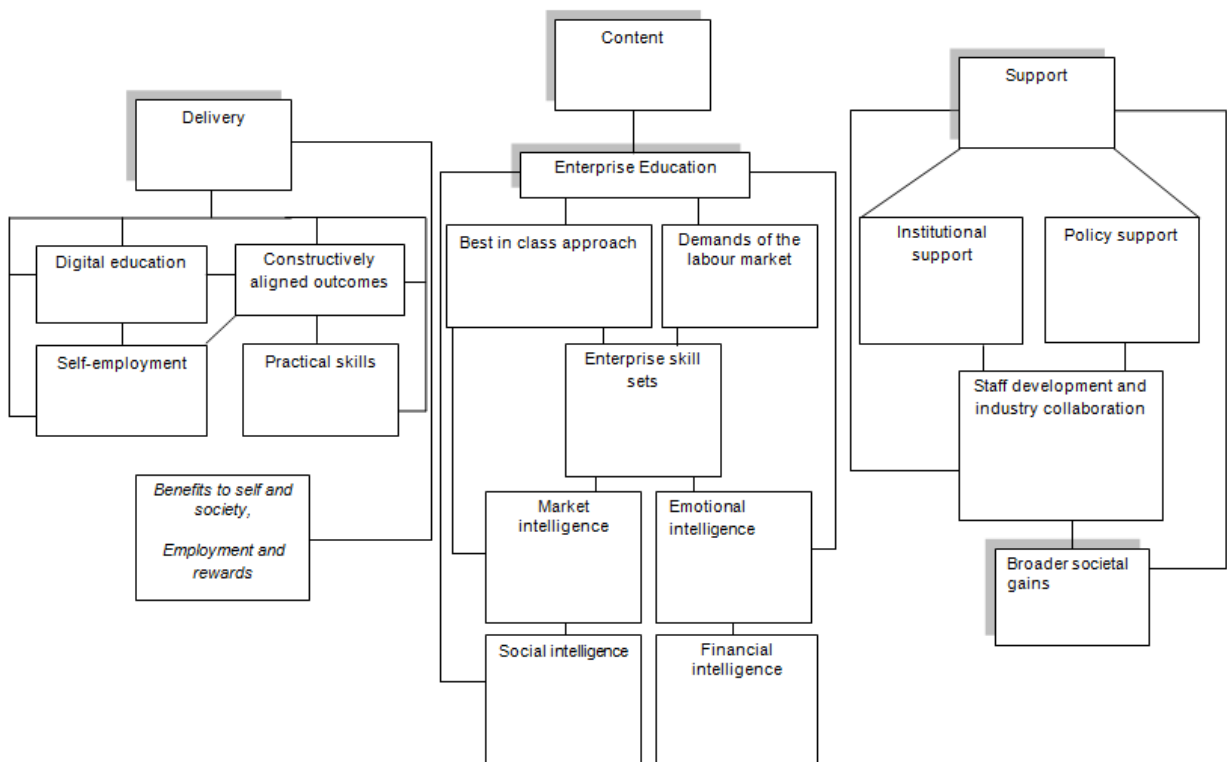
This is in line with Scuotto and Morellato’s (2013: pp 301) study which demonstrates “the relevance of digital competence in starting new business ventures and it emphasizes the importance of improving the development of digital competence in higher education that goes beyond the simple training of technical skills”.

In sum, we end with the declaration of a respondent who added:

‘The classes were very interactive and more like workshops and everyone in class was encouraged to challenge the materials and content and expected to make a contribution. The content was also very good with lots of activities for us to apply the theory we were given. Overall, it was highly interactive and the students really responded to it. In other modules, we were in very large classrooms but here we were in smaller classes with lots of technology and this helped with the learning I think as we could relax or be creative ourselves. (Case 1).

Therefore, we propose a model where the key three learning elements: content, delivery, and support are intertwined and driven by the delivery approach (Figure 1). This emphasizes the human centered model in an entrepreneurial education programme.

Fig. 1 Proposed model



6. Module Evaluation Questionnaires for Business Acceleration Module

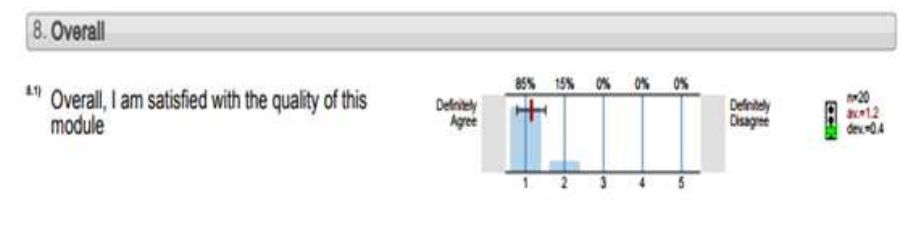
Sequential Exploration Stage 2

Drawing on the Stage 1 insights Stage 2 of the study concentrates on developing an understanding of how student satisfaction is impacted by the key aspects of Learning Opportunities and Engagement and Teaching. This is investigated in a qualitative case study conducted on a sample of 22 Business Students undertaking a 6 week Enterprise Module, Business Acceleration at the University of the West of Scotland. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

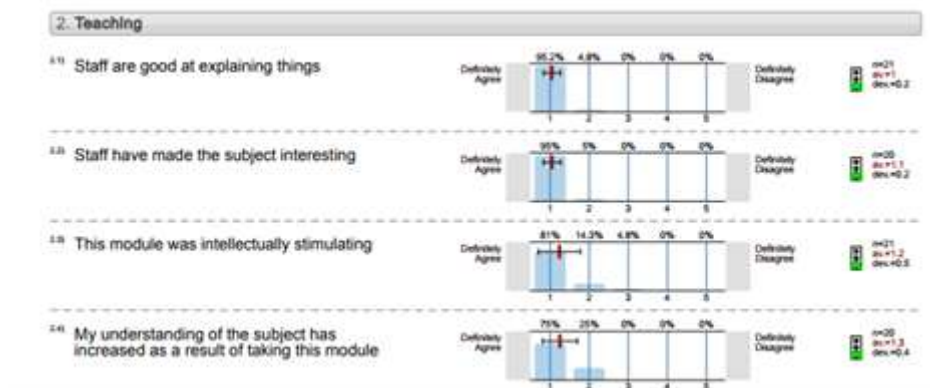
No. of responses = 22

Response Rate = 84.6%

Overall Student Satisfaction



Teaching (The Staff)



BAS2 - "Interesting and very skilfully delivered".

BAS5 - "Great energy, understanding and very interesting Module made by the Lecturer.

BAS10 - "Lecturer presented well, very interactive, loads of physical examples to discuss between class, Assessment clearly explained."

BAS11 - "Lecturer clearly put lots of work and effort to make this Module enjoyable and interesting. Topics were explained clearly."

BAS12 - "The teaching has been by far the best bit of this Module. The teaching made me look forward to class every week."

BAS14 - "Lecturer is amazing at making it interesting."

BAS16 - "Lecturer made Module interesting and is good at keeping class engaged. Good balance of practical group work and theory. Lecturer also speaks and treats you like an adult."

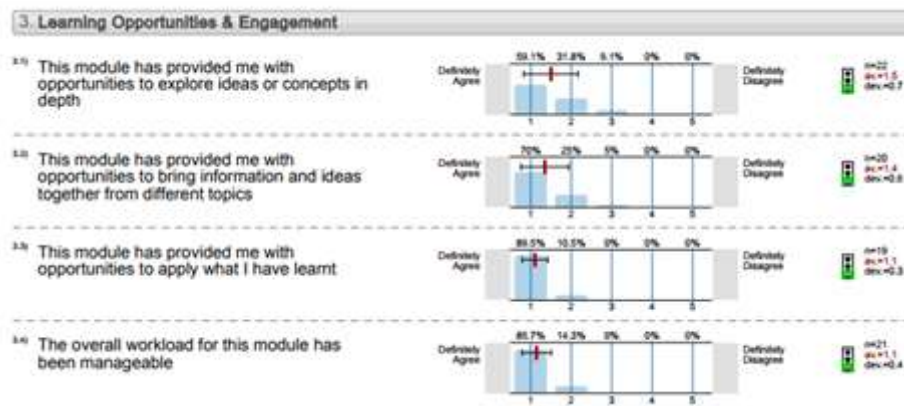
BAS17 - "Lecturer made the Module very engaging, interacting with each individual student".

BAS19 - "Lecturer is very good and made the Module even more interesting."

BAS20 - “Good/fun lectures/lecturer”.

BAS22 - “Any support needed was given. Good group work, we know what work we have to do.”

Learning Opportunities and Engagement (The Module)



BAS1 - “Very engaging Module.”

BAS3 - “Enjoyed working as a group. Different to other Modules. Really interactive.”

BAS4 - “Positive and productive atmosphere.”

BAS6 - “Stimulating and motivational when thinking about starting your own business. Thank you”.

BAS7 - “Engaging.”

BAS8 - “Helped with my understanding of growing a business.”

BAS9 - “Engaging classroom environment, interesting, fun.”

BAS13 - “Engaged through group work, always refreshing points that have been previously stated, keen for involvement - class discussion.”

BAS14 - “Best Module I’ve taken, its real life. A Module I would hate to miss.”

BAS15 - “Very encouraging, can openly speak ideas in class, very productive and motivating, lots of chances to work in groups.”

BAS18 - “Good interaction, interesting.”

BAS19 - “The Module is well organised and resources on Virtual Learning Environment are very helpful and easy to find/understand.”

BAS20 - Enjoyable group work, realistic in terms of business.

BAS21 - “I came into the class with little interest in the subject but I am feeling very interested now with very interesting content and delivery”.

7. Exploratory Findings: Emotions and Perspectives

Unequivocally, the perspectives and emotions of students during their entrepreneurial journey have a bearable impact on their personal and/or group assessment of how an EE module or programme transpired. These perspectives and emotions are indicative within the Likert-scaling used within the survey protocol, as well as the open ended questions to allow for qualitative student feedback. Results from the survey data displayed a positive reaction to the practical methods of teaching delivered. This included their approval of their interaction in longer tutorial sessions, and participation in dynamic group activities. This encourages and increases autonomy, decision-making, personal and interpersonal skills, project and time management, amongst other entrepreneurially-beneficial attributes. As for the display of course content, students also appreciated the clear topics presented such as idea generation, business planning, and financial forecasting; representing an industrial focus. Experienced knowledge from the module teaching team also instils confidence in the students as an informed bridging of educational and enterprising ideals is apparent.

8. Best Practice Methods

As discussed previously, the analysis of our empirical contribution is focused around one sub-question: ***How can enterprise education methods nurture new entrepreneurs?***

This paper asserts that in sustaining high levels of entrepreneurial practice towards EE, a number of key traits in content, teaching style, assessment, and delivery are witnessed. Firstly, content must be contemporary and engage, both theoretically and practically, in the various aspects of capital and intelligence: *social, market, emotional, and financial*. These embolden future and nascent entrepreneurs in becoming aware and informed of their immediate, national, and international surroundings. These aspects can be embedded into modules and/or programmes through discussion of the associated terminology, as well as initiating practical activities and group-based tutorial work.

Secondly, educators must be flexible in their approach, adopting a *dynamic* and *approachable* style. In reflecting business and entrepreneurial realities, EE must adapt to contemporary ideals, organisational practices, and modes of learning.

Thirdly, the assessment must enable students to rightfully and timely execute *entrepreneurial skills*. This allows for both the assessment posed and the students within the environment to be more enterprising.

Fourthly, the delivery should be more weighted, as indicated earlier, to *practical exposure* of entrepreneurialism. This uniquely sets EE apart from other, more traditional forms of business education. As opposed to the critical arguments and theorems related to the management, accounting, law, strategy, and human resource management disciplines, aspects of entrepreneurship, EE, and leadership require the intervention of practical scenarios and analysis within their curriculum.

9. Implications for Future Study

This research documents an exploratory study that gauges HE-internal stakeholder views of educational experiences and student journeys. This research impacts on the growing concept of EE, adopted by business schools, concerning method selection and rationalisation. The findings from this research present practical implications in delivering and supporting effective entrepreneurial practices within business schools. Questions of *why* and *how*, relating to EE methods, are addressed within this research, impacting on further practice and research by business schools. In successfully implementing the core ideas from this paper, aspects and activities alluding to the emergence and sustaining of a commonly viewed entrepreneurial university are required. This includes the particular personalities and outlined entrepreneurial competences, for the classroom, which should be identified when adopting best practice methods of EE.

Chiefly, this paper has, through a pragmatic investigation of the educational environment, discussed the various feedbacks from students towards more entrepreneurial practices for EE. This shall inform educators of ways to improve their content, the assessments posed, and the learning spaces and delivery styles adopted. Further empirical investigation would be highly advantageous towards this type of study. For example, a longitudinal effort concerning this particular module would enhance its rigour and relevancy, within the programme's pool of courses as well as achieving stronger links with industry and graduate employment destinations. Involvement of previous students, who have completed the module, in a retrospective focus group for example, would highly benefit the periodic updating of the course content, delivery, and assessment style.

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